



interfaith partnership against domestic violence  
because no one should have to choose between faith and safety

## For Jewish victims of sexual and domestic violence...

...religious teachings can be a barrier to freedom or a precious resource.

Nothing in Jewish teaching justifies the abuse of another person. Even so, the silence and denial resulting from a lack of understanding or skills can create barriers that become overwhelming to victims. The concepts below, properly understood, can help Jewish victims to understand that their heritage supports a life of safety and freedom from abuse.

***Pikuach nefesh*** means saving a life. Jewish tradition teaches that saving a life supersedes all other obligations, even taking precedence over the daily observance of Jewish practices.

***Shalom bayit*** means peace in the home. It refers to an ideal married state which a couple creates through shared responsibility, mutuality, and free choice. Although it is the abuser who destroys *shalom bayit*, not the victim, this concept is sometimes misinterpreted to hold a woman solely responsible for the creation of peace in the home. *Shalom bayit* is often stated as a reason why Jewish women tend to stay in abusive relationships longer than non-Jewish women.

***Ona'at devarim*** or oppression by means of words is forbidden in Jewish tradition.

***Hillul Ha-Shem*** means the desecration of God's name. Some victims fear that reporting abuse will dishonor the Jewish Community or God, but many rabbis believe that *Hillul Ha-shem* occurs at the moment of battering, not when a woman reports abuse. It is greater *Hillul Ha-shem* to stay silent about abuse. Getting help and ensuring the safety of oneself and ones children are acts of *Kiddush Ha-shem*, or sanctification of God's name.

***Teshuvah*** literally means "returning" and refers to the act of returning to a life of decency after atoning for the harm one has done to another. *Teshuvah* depends on participation in an active process that includes acknowledging the abusive behavior, feeling remorse, confessing publicly, asking for forgiveness, making restitution, and refraining from abuse in the future. Only time can prove if true repentance has occurred. It is distortion for the concept of *teshuvah* to be used to pressure a victim into forgiving an abuser. Even if an abuser has gone through *teshuvah*, it is up to the survivor to decide when and if she will forgive. If reconciliation is not possible, then it is better to mourn the loss of the relationship, to move on, and to know that God will be with you.

*This synopsis has been provided by Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence using material from FaithTrust Institute's "To Save a Life: Enduring Domestic Violence in Jewish Families." This video and other resources from FaithTrust Institute can be ordered by contacting them at FaithTrust Institute 2400 N. 45<sup>th</sup> Street, #10, Seattle, WA 98103.*